



## MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY OF SERVICE

Corporation for  
**NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE** ★★ ★

# Project: Promote Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and the Earned Income Tax Credit

Most of us have experienced the confusion and anxiety associated with filing our income taxes and not knowing which credits and deductions apply to our situation. For the many individuals facing the day-to-day challenges of poverty, filing taxes can seem especially daunting and, as a result, millions of eligible low-income workers do not receive the income tax credits and refunds that are designated to them. Many workers are also misled by expensive “guaranteed refund” and “rapid refund loan” schemes because they do not know that credible, free tax filing assistance is available to them.

Two programs, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA), work in conjunction to alleviate the burdens and confusion of tax season on low-income individuals. By getting the word out about these programs to your neighbors and local communities, you can make a huge impact for individuals in your community and create economic stimulus in the targeted locations that stimulus is needed most. There are five key steps to putting together an activity to help promote awareness about the EITC and VITA.

- 1) The Earned Income Tax Credit, one of the federal government’s largest and most effective anti-poverty programs, is a federal tax credit for families and individuals who work but make very low incomes. The EITC results in an extra tax refund to those who claim and qualify for the credit. In fact, when the EITC credit exceeds the amount of taxes owed, qualifying individuals receive that credit in their refund, which can benefit both the recipient and stimulate the local economy. The EITC helps to reduce the federal tax burden on low-income workers.

The best way to educate yourself about the EITC and the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program is to visit the [EITC Information for IRS Partners](#) and [EITC Central](#). These sites have online toolkits with great information, tools, and products to learn more about the EITC and VITA.

For more EITC and VITA information and outreach materials, explore these sources:

- [EITC Awareness Day – January 2014](#) Sponsored by the IRS, EITC Awareness involves partners across the country in a one-day media event to raise awareness about EITC and promote free tax assistance. The EITC Awareness Day may be an excellent way for VISTAs to get involved. More Information is available at <http://www.eitc.irs.gov/Partner-Toolkit/awarenessday>.
- [EITC Central](#). An online source for ready-to-use [news releases](#), [letters to the editor](#), and [tweets](#). You will also find [local statistics](#), [fact sheets](#), [fast facts](#), [newsletter](#) articles, [tips](#) for running an EITC campaign, and other basic [marketing and communication](#) materials. For websites and Facebook pages, download a [banner ads](#). There are even pre-recorded [on-hold messages](#), in English and Spanish, for the telephone system.

- [Marketing Express](#). Another source of grab and go products to help carry out the EITC message. You can create customized posters and print ads featuring the new EITC ad campaign with your organization name, address and message. Check out the EITC Marketing Made Easy webinar on the [IRS video portal](#). Get a peek at the new EITC ad campaign and a quick “how-to” demonstration for using EITC Central and Marketing Express.
  - [Toolkit for EITC Outreach](#). The National Tax Credit Outreach Campaign website provides a clearinghouse of tools and resources for state and local outreach, including strategies to launch a statewide communications campaign. A free hard-copy of the kit is mailed to any organization on request. Requests for the kit can be made at the website, which also provides translations of an outreach flyer in 19 languages other than English and Spanish.
  - [The National EITC Outreach Partnership](#). A partnership of national organizations and federal agencies designed to assist to assist national, state and local EITC outreach and free tax assistance programs and to encourage such programs to link with asset development efforts. Site includes a [directory of partnerships](#) by state, including contact information for the EITC coalition lead.
  - [AARP Foundation Tax Aide](#). A free, volunteer-run [tax assistance and preparation service](#) available to taxpayers that have low and moderate income, with special attention to those ages 60 and older.
- 2) Once you’re up to speed with the EITC and VITA resources that are available to your community, the next step is the need to assemble a motivated team, reach agreement upon clear tasks, assign reachable goals, and act with inspiration and purpose.

Start the conversation based on the prior successes of others. Starting ideas for your plan can be found at <http://www.eitc.irs.gov/Partner-Toolkit/tips> when you click on one of the links under the heading “Downloadable versions of Tried and True Tips.” You may wish to print out this and other resources and use them as a jumping off point as you meet with your team.

Some of the most exciting ideas from the Tried and True Tips include:

- Use social media and your own website or blog
- Work with your local media
- Table or distribute fliers at established community events, community centers, schools, non-profits and businesses

Furthermore, you can learn about and team up with the VITA sites in your community. VITA sites are often located in community and neighborhood centers, libraries, schools, shopping malls, and other locations around the country. To find the closest VITA site, call a toll free hotline 1-800-906-9887.

For more information on VITA program, visit:  
<http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=107626,00.html>.

Contact the VITA site to tell them about the King Day of Service and ask how you might be able to participate in service activities that support EITC and VITA. You may also wish to volunteer in programs locally. Many VITA sites have customized information and flyers ready to be shared with your community. The VITA site may not be familiar with the EITC Awareness Campaign, but we know you will be creative. Here are a few more ideas to get you started:

- Identify local VITA sites in your community and share referral information about the EITC and local

VITA sites with your own VISTA project and its beneficiaries

- Research other King Day activities occurring in your community and set up an information table about VITA sites and the EITC. You can search for other community projects, or register your own, at <http://www.mlkday.gov>
- Assist a local VITA site by identifying potential tax preparation volunteers from the Baby Boomer community or a nearby Senior Corps RSVP site.
- Connect a local VITA site with a local school so that students can bring VITA and EITC information home to their families.
- Help an [educational institution](#) or organization to become a [Facilitated Self Assistance](#) location where taxpayers have the opportunity to prepare and file their own return using brand name software at no cost.
- Contact the IRS for [Volunteer training](#) and be connected to a sponsoring organization.

#### Making an effective plan:

- Start off planning with folks you know and ask them to tell others to join your efforts. Use the facts you've learned about the importance of the EITC and its underutilization in low-income communities to excite others to act.
- Meet regularly, especially as MLK Day approaches, and solicit input from everyone. Make sure that your planning meetings are structured and conscious of time so that no one feels hurried or bored and everyone has a chance to be heard. Assign roles during the meeting such as note keeper, discussion leader and timekeeper.
- Use the meetings to assign concrete tasks with specific follow-up dates to keep everyone motivated and on track.
- Talk about the parallels and differences between your effort to alleviate poverty by spreading the word about the EITC program and the anti-poverty efforts of Martin Luther King Jr.
- Decide how you want to reach out with information to your community.
- Determine what kinds of supplies you will need for the activities you seek to do. These may include paper, pens, photocopies of outreach materials and refreshments.
- Contact local businesses to seek in-kind donations of supplies or food.
- Purchase the necessary supplies before the service day and have them ready to go. Be sure to store any perishables in appropriate places.
- Set goals for yourselves, such as number of people contacted, age groups represented, and number of partnering locations where outreach occurs.
- Record these goals and make sure you can meet them. If your initial assessment turns out to be too ambitious, revise the goals so the whole team will feel great about what you accomplish.
- [Post your project](#) on our site so that people in your area can join your efforts

#### 3) It's time to get out and engage the communities you've decided to reach out to:

- Make sure project leaders or coordinators are at the site early, setting up supplies and ready to greet team members and participants as they arrive. Consider making volunteer task descriptions or one-page cheat sheets so that volunteers know the who, what, where, when and why of their role and various tasks this day.
- Remind volunteers to refer specific tax questions or questions that are unaddressed by your outreach materials to people in the know, such as VITA site volunteers.
- Encourage yourself and others to step outside of the comfort zone and eagerly talk about the purpose of

the day – MLK’s last goal of solving economic injustice, and the exciting opportunities available to qualified workers that can help individuals and families and stimulate the economy. If you’re tabling with teams of two, take turns standing in front of the table and greeting community members. If you’re distributing fliers or other outreach, share your eagerness and encourage the people you’re interacting with to continue to share the message.

- Conduct your planned activities, offering continuous encouragement to all participants.
  - Consider ending the day with a shared reflection on everything that’s happened during the day and its connection to MLK’s last goal of solving economic injustice. Ask if anyone learned or experienced something unexpected.
- 4) After the project is completed, take some time to assess and reflect on it. Think about what went well and what could be improved.
- Host an official debriefing meeting for team members after the service day.
  - Examine the goals you set for yourselves and consider which you met, exceeded, and didn’t quite reach.
  - Who did your work impact? What did you accomplish? How did it feel?
  - Ask everyone for their honest assessment of what went well and how to improve for next time.
  - Consider what doing this work on MLK Day, in particular, meant to you.

We know you might not like to brag, but please do! You may inspire others to organize an EITC and VITA event once they hear what you accomplished. [Share your service story](#). We're listening and want to know what you did.